

LaRC Human Capital News

Your Source for Current HR Information

Information contained in this newsletter is applicable to civil service employees covered by Title 5, Office of Personnel Management Code of Federal Regulations.



Management Corner

The transformation is progressing as scheduled. Employees have been cross-walked to the new organizations, the business systems have been updated with the new organization data, and the new leaders of Langley Research Center have been selected. All this is a good start; however, there is more to be done to ensure the success of the transformation. OHR has begun developing the plan for the GS-15 placement process.

We have been working with the new leadership to refine their organizations. In addition, we are providing position management training to our leaders and are developing standards for common positions within the Center. In addition to these initiatives, we are putting in place a workforce restructuring board to review personnel actions that affect our transformation goals. All this will help move us close to our transformation goals.

Health Savings Account (HSA)/Health Reimbursement Account (HRA)



The Office of Personnel Management will be offering HSAs and HRAs this year as part of the 2004 Federal Health Benefits Program. An HSA is a trust account that you own for the purpose of paying qualified medical expenses for yourself, your spouse, and your dependents. An HRA is an account to reimburse allowable medical expenses. In order to be eligible for a HSA or HRA, you must participate in a High Deductible Health Plan (HDHP). An HDHP is a new health plan product that, when combined with a Health Savings, provides insurance coverage and a tax-advantaged way to help save for future medical expenses. The goal is to give you greater flexibility and discretion over how you use your health care dollars. General features of an HDHP include:

- A higher annual deductible than traditional health plans.
- A minimum annual deductible of \$1,500 for Self and \$2,100 for Self and Family coverage.
- Annual out-of-pocket limits not to exceed \$5,000 for Self and \$10,000 for Family coverage.
- Service delivery may be offered with a Preferred Provider Organization (PPO), Health Maintenance Organization (HMO), or Point of Service (POS).
- The health plan determines eligibility for a HSA or a HRA.

- With the exception of preventive care, the annual deductible must be met before the plan benefits are paid.

General features of an HSA include:

- Your own HSA contributions are tax deductible.
- Interest earned on your account is tax free.
- Tax-free withdrawals may be made for qualified medical expenses.
- Unused funds and interest are carried over, without limit, from year to year.
- You own the HSA and it is yours to keep, even when you change plans or retire.
- Your HSA is administered by a trustee/custodian.

You may be ineligible for an HSA if you have a flexible spending account (FSA), a spouse's FSA, a spouse's HMO, other non-high deductible health insurance coverage, TRICARE, Medicare, or are in receipt of VA benefits within the previous 3 months. You can still have other disability, dental, vision, and long-term care insurance policies. If you are ineligible for an HSA, you may be eligible for an HRA.

General features of an HRA include:

- Tax-free withdrawals for qualified medical expenses.
- Carryover of unused credits from year to year.
- Credits in an HRA do not earn interest.
- Credits in an HRA are forfeited if you leave the federal employment or switch health insurance plans.
- Your HRA is administered by the health plan.

For more information on HDCP, HSA, and HRA, visit <http://www.opm.gov/hsa>.

2004 Federal Employees Health Benefits Program Open Season

The 2004 Federal Employees Health Benefits (FEHB) Open Season will be held from November 8 through December 13, 2004.

All 2005 FEHB Guides, health plan brochures, and the 2005 premium rates will be available on the OPM Web site at www.opm.gov/insure/health. The guides, brochures, and text versions suitable for visually impaired will be available in PDF format for downloading and printing.



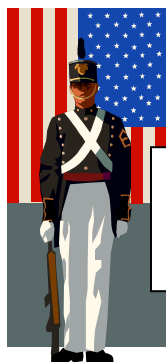
"Use or Lose" Annual Leave

It's getting close to the end of the leave year (January 8, 2005) and federal employees are only entitled to carry over a maximum of 30 days (240 hours) of annual leave into the next leave year. Annual leave in excess of this amount is subject to forfeiture and becomes "use or lose" leave. Therefore, if you haven't scheduled your "use or lose" leave, now is a good time to do so.

In order for leave to be eligible for restoration, an employee must have requested annual leave and had the leave approved in writing at least three pay periods before the end of the leave year (i.e. by November 28, 2004).

If you are trying to figure out how to use up all of your use-or-lose leave, an option to consider is donating some of that leave to one or more of your co-workers who are in the leave transfer program. These are

employees who have been ill, or are caring for a family member who is ill, and have exhausted all of their leave.



New Medals Recognizing Veteran's Service

Two new medals have been authorized by President Bush, the Global War on Terrorism Expeditionary Medal and the Global War on Terrorism Service Medal. Each medal carries with it separate and unique benefits for veterans. Receipt of the Expeditionary medal qualifies veterans for veterans' preference, provided the individual is otherwise eligible. Receipt of the Service medal qualifies veterans for a Veterans' Recruitment Appointment (VRA). Veterans with a service connected disability or those who have received a Purple Heart are entitled to 10 point veterans' preference regardless of eligibility for the service of expeditionary medals.

The Defense Department announced final approval for the award criteria of the Global War on Terrorism Expeditionary and Service Medals. The Global War on Terrorism Expeditionary Medal will be awarded to those service members who deployed overseas for service in the Global War on Terrorism operations on or after September 11, 2001, and up to a future date to be determined by the Secretary of Defense. Initial award of this medal is limited to personnel deployed abroad in

Operations Enduring Freedom and Iraqi Freedom.

Initial award of the Global War on Terrorism Service Medal will be limited to domestic airport security operations and service members who support Operations Enduring Freedom, Noble Eagle, and Iraqi Freedom.

Continuing Resolutions



When Congress cannot or does not pass a budget and the end of the fiscal year runs out, we aren't authorized to spend any money. The money must be appropriated and when it isn't, Congress passes a continuing resolution, which keeps the budget running at the same level as before. This, of course, puts new work on hold and means no pay raise until we get a formal budget. This has happened for the past 2 years so don't be surprised if the pay adjustments are retroactive again this year.

Flu Shots??

Yes! We have a limited supply.

NASA is following the recommendations from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) regarding distribution. Priority will be given to those age 65 and older, pregnant women, and those with underlying chronic medical conditions. Please monitor @LaRC for specific information from the Clinic regarding distribution.



Is It a Cold or The Flu?

Colds and influenza (the flu) are often confused with one another. Both are caused by viruses, and both occur most often in the winter months. But there are some important differences.

Colds are minor infections of the nose and throat caused by many different viruses. Colds usually last for about a week; however, some can last longer, especially in children, elderly people, and those in poor health. Cold symptoms develop over a few days and include: runny nose, congestion, sneezing, weakened senses of taste and smell, scratchy throat, and cough.

The flu is caused by the influenza virus and is more serious than a cold because it can be fatal for the elderly, people with a chronic condition, or those with a weak immune system. Symptoms come on very quickly, can be severe, and include: temperature of 101 degrees or above, cough, muscle aches, headache, sore throat, chills, and tiredness. Most people recover from the flu within 2 weeks, but others may feel weak for a long time, even after symptoms go away.

To reduce the spread of germs, you should:

- Cover your mouth and nose when you sneeze or cough.
- Wash your hands with soap and hot water for at least 20 seconds.
- Avoid touching your eyes, nose, or mouth.
- Get plenty of sleep.

- Drink plenty of fluids and eat nutritious foods.



Excused Absence for Voting

The Federal Government has a longstanding policy of granting employees limited time off from work (i.e., excused absence) to vote in Federal, state, county, or municipal elections or in referendums on any civic matter in their community. Agencies have discretionary authority to grant excused absence to the extent that such time off does not seriously interfere with agency operations. Typically, polling places throughout the United States are open for extended periods of time. Therefore, excused absence should rarely be needed.

We normally receive a number of questions about excused absence for the purpose of voting in a Presidential election, held this year on November 2, 2004. In anticipation of these questions, we offer the following guidelines when considering excused absence for voting in unusual situations:

Generally, where the polls are not open at least 3 hours either before or after an employee's regular work hours, supervisors may grant a limited amount of excused absence that will permit the employee to report for work 3 hours after the polls open or leave from work 3 hours before the polls close, whichever requires the lesser amount of time off. An employee's "regular work hours" should be determined by reference to the time of day the employee normally arrives at and departs from work.

If an employee's voting place is beyond normal commuting distance and vote by absentee ballot is not permitted, the employing agency may grant excused absence (not to exceed 1 day) to allow the employee to make the trip to the voting place to cast a ballot. If more than 1 day is needed, the employee may request annual leave or leave without pay for the additional period of absence.

Thrift Savings Plan (TSP) Open Season

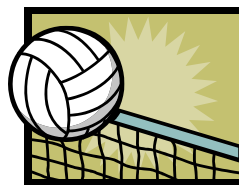


The TSP Open Season began October 15 and runs through December 31, 2004. During this time, you will be able to increase the maximum amount you can contribute to your TSP account. Civil Service Retirement System (CSRS) maximum will be 10%; Federal Employee Retirement System (FERS) will be 15%. The overall maximum allowable contributions are \$13,000 for 2004.

Flexible Spending Account for Federal Employees (FSAFEDS) Open Season

Open season for FSAFEDS is November 8 through December 13, 2004, for the 2005 plan year.

If you were enrolled in the FSA program during the 2004 plan year, you must enroll during the upcoming open season in order to continue coverage. Deductions are terminated automatically at the end of each plan year.



Recreational News

Employee fitness is very important to individuals and LaRC Leadership. Fitness is consistent with our NASA Values and contributes to the success of each individual and NASA. Some benefits to the individual includes:

- Lower levels of employee's stress.
- Improves stamina while promoting potential weight reduction.
- Increases employee's well-being, self-image, and self-esteem.

Benefits to NASA include:

- Enhanced recruitment and retention of healthy employees.
- Improved health care costs.
- Decreased rates of illness and injuries.
- Reduces employee absenteeism and enhances productivity.

Recently, many of the LaRC workforce have expressed concern about the availability of the Langley Air Force Base (LAFB) Fitness Facilities. There has been high demand for use of the new state-of-the-art Air Force Fitness Facilities and equipment by DoD eligible military and civilian personnel and their families. The two fitness centers average use is approximately 3,350 individuals per day. This high usage rate coupled with the increased emphasis on physical fitness by the Air Force for military personnel resulted in the NASA civil service and contractors becoming ineligible to use the Air Force Fitness Center. However, NASA personnel with DoD identification may use the facility.

In an effort to regain access to the Air Force Fitness Centers, a letter was sent on July 30, 2004, to the Commander of 1st Services

Squadron. This letter requested reconsideration of their decision to deny the NASA workforce the use of the LAFB Fitness Centers. The Office of Human Resources has followed up on the letter status twice with the latest follow up on October 1, 2004, and LAFB Services indicated that they are still staffing the issue for the Commanders final decision. A decision is expected in a few weeks. It would be premature at this time to announce or determine the final decision by the LAFB Commanding Officer on the use of the LAFB Fitness Facilities.

The Air Force decision has placed increased emphasis on the need to modernize the NASA LaRC Fitness Center. A LaRC Employee Fitness Focus Group was held on October 12, 2004. The group's primary goal was to provide customer desired needs and interest in development of a time-phased Fitness Center Modernization Plan. The group identified improvements for major areas to include equipment, facilities, classes, usage, patrons, and staff. Current conditions and prioritized solutions were developed based on current industry standards and trends as related to customer desires. This plan will be released in the near future.

In addition, the Morale, Welfare, and Recreation Branch (MWRB), OHR, has had various meetings and discussions with the Services Deputy Director and Marketing Manager since July on defining and formalizing the eligibility for use of services by the NASA LaRC workforce. In these meetings, the LAFB Service Staff have indicated that the NASA badged workforce can currently use all other MWR services and programs with the exception of the Fitness Center and the Child Development Center. The programs that NASA badged workforce can use includes the Golf Course, Auto Shop,

Skills Development Center, Outdoor Recreation, Bowling Center, Officers Club for those that meet civil service grade level restrictions for membership, Community Center, Outdoor Pools, Information, Ticketing & Travel, and Special Events. Information on service programs is available at <http://www.langley1stservices.com/index.htm>

Main Cafeteria and Exchange Shop News

The Main Cafeteria and Exchange Shop will undergo a facelift beginning on November 11, 2004, with a completion date of mid-March. The project will be completed in two phases allowing for continued customer dining for breakfast and lunch. The cafeteria lunch hours of operations are being expanded from 10:30 a.m. until 2 p.m. to allow employees additional flexibility in planning their lunch period. Some temporary closures will occur with the first one-day closing occurring on November 12 as well as additional closures during the holiday season. The Aerodyner will be opened for customers on days that the Main Cafeteria closes. Catered events will also be at the Aerodyner since the NACA Room will be used for general dining. Information on Main Cafeteria closures and opening of the Aerodyner will be announced in @LaRC in advance. The Exchange Shop will be temporarily relocated within the Main Cafeteria from Room 129A to Room 140 for your continued customer shopping during the renovation.



WORKFORCE PLANNING, ANALYSIS, and MANAGEMENT

Workforce, Planning, Analysis, and Management is an issue that requires a lot of attention with a strong focus on a fair and consistent application of personnel laws, rules, regulations, and policies to achieve a workforce that is aligned with the mission, strategy focused, cost effective, and strong in the desired workforce competencies. To this end, a 14 member Workforce Requirements Board (WRB) consisting of OHR, Office of Chief Financial Officer, Directorates, Shared Services Units, Strategic Planning Representative, and the Associate Director for Operations will be established to:

- Resolve FTE complement issues and establish Perm and Term guidelines.
- Resolve workforce (WF) imbalances between Project demand and organization allocations.
- Ensure budget changes that impact WF are communicated to all organizations.
- Monitor, resolve, and manage transition WF issues.
- Coordinate across the entire Center to effectively respond to WF planning, analysis, and management actions.
- Provide periodic updates to the SLC on decisions, actions, status, etc.
- Communicate and coordinate plans to support POP planning with SLC.
- Review and approve New Position and Accretion of Duty requests.
- Evaluate changes to organization baselines from reorganization.

- Monitor Center critical WF competency usage and gaps.
- Ensure project (task) level requirements for WF, milestones, and facilities are kept current and WF planning is current.
- Recommend and ensure implementation of WF planning process changes.
- Review and approve OUP changes pertaining to org structure changes.

The board will become the single focal point for discussion and resolution of workforce related issues and will allow for a corporate understanding of funding, staffing issues, and consequences associated with solutions. The board will ensure the organizations buy in and ownership of solutions which will allow for balanced assessments, sounding board opportunities, and coordination activities that support the Center's mission and goals. It will also work to balance budget and workforce issues.

OHR on the CUTTING EDGE

A recent report by the Partnership for Public Service stated that federal

managers use outdated and ineffective tools to assess the talent of job applicants, giving rise to the widespread hiring of workers whose skills are poorly matched to their duties.

Max Stier's group advocates revamping the hiring processes by identifying the skills needed to perform specific jobs, testing applicants on those skills through written exams and role-playing, and conducting "structured interviews" in which all job seekers are asked a set of questions that target certain skills.

The process we are using at LaRC to assess leadership competencies incorporates some of the recommended practices of the

Partnership for Public Service.

Here is the link to the Washington Post article.

<http://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-dyn/articles/A28036-2004Oct12.html>



QUESTION OF THE MONTH

Q: If a person is eligible for a Discontinued Service Retirement (DSR) will they receive severance pay if they are involuntarily separate from Federal Service?

A: No. Severance Pay will only be given to employees who are not eligible to retire. According to 5 CFR 550.704 (b) (5), If an employee is eligible upon separation for an immediate annuity from a Federal civilian retirement system or from the uniformed services. Such an employee is ineligible even if all or part of the annuity is offset by payments from a non-Federal retirement system the employee elected instead of Federal civilian retirement benefits or disability benefits received from the Department of Veterans Affairs.